

Against the Grain

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Back Talk — “Alive, Alive-oh!” The Widening Reach of Library Publishing

Ann Okerson

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Back Talk — “Alive, Alive-oh!” The Widening Reach of Library Publishing

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The second most remarkable thing in Dublin, Ireland the last week of February was the weather — we were there for several days and were rained on for only ten minutes the whole time. Otherwise the days were sunny and mild, spring flowers were blooming, and hearts were gladdened. Even the bronze statue of **Molly Malone**, the fish-lady of legend, was looking almost cheerful.

But the most remarkable event was a two-day conference/workshop sponsored by our **IFLA Library Publishing Special Interest Group** and held on the premises of the **Dublin Business School** about two blocks from **Molly's** statue. Ever since the **Goodall Family Foundation** gave a grant to **Alex Holzman** and me to document this emerging area of library activity, I've been involved in it — and in **IFLA** for many years — and had an organizing role in this event. (“The Once and Future Publishing Library,” Washington DC, CLIR, 2015. <https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub166/>. It had an impact when we wrote it, and now reads more like a historical monument!)

The remarkable success of the **Dublin/IFLA SIG** meeting had everything to do with the currency and importance of the subject PLUS the splendid organization by two dynamic Irish librarians, **Jane Buggle** of **DBS** and her colleague **Marie O'Neill**, who has just moved from **DBS** to **CCT College**, a nearby technology institute. Also present and lending strong support was the impressive **Dr. Philip Cohen**, President of the **Library Association of Ireland**.

The last similar meeting co-sponsored with **IFLA** was held at the **University of Michigan** in summer 2016 as a preconference to the main **IFLA Congress** in Columbus. That exceptional Ann Arbor event was heavy on

startups, theory, and prospects; in Dublin there were striking stories of successful, scaled-up projects and the growing routinization of publishing into library missions and workflow. (Proceedings in the special issue of *Journal of Electronic Publishing*: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/jep/3336451.0020.2*)

Many speakers stepped up: among them were **Tom Grady** of **White Rose University Press**, a consortium of university libraries in north Yorkshire (where the white rose was worn in the War of the Roses); **Suzanne Cady Stapleton** of the **University of Florida**; **Christina Lenz** of **Stockholm University Press**; **Helge Hølvik** and **Trude Eikebrokk** of **OsloMet University Library**; **Ally Laird** of **Penn State**; **Helen Fallon** of Ireland's **Maynooth University Library**; and **Michelle Wilson** of **Columbia University Library** — all with success stories to tell and interesting lessons to draw. And at some point, the quantity of success stories began to be a lesson in itself of just how much is going on.

Though a couple of the efforts originated with “University Press” in their title, the presentations were all emphatically efforts arising mainly from libraries. There's a clear delineation of sectors between three related enterprises: institutional repositories, library publishing, and university presses. Institutional repositories concentrate on the output of the local institution, work being done by and in libraries with emphasis on collection and curation; outputs such as print and digital journals

or monographs are not usually in the IR remit. At the other end of the spectrum, university presses can play in an ambitious league with commercial publishers of all scopes and scales — and some university presses themselves achieve impressive scale — often they may think and act

like commercial enterprises, whose sales and marketing concerns are real and important. The library publishing sector, it's becoming clear, lies between IRs and Presses, and it fills an important intermediate role. Two of the stories we heard gave striking examples.

White Rose publishes monographs coming mainly from three collaborating universities (**York**, **Sheffield**, and **Leeds**). One of their recent efforts is an extensive two-volume study (with both print and digital distribution channels) reporting the results of a long running archaeological dig in Yorkshire (*Star Carr*), concentrating on the Anglo-Saxon period. This is exactly the sort of thing a University Press might publish, with every reason to expect that sales might soar into the very low three-figure range. But, after a very short time, the open-access distribution of *this* study has reached 6000 downloads around the world. As a traditional university press product for sale, it would have seen almost all of those hundred copies go to university libraries, most of them in the region of the press and excavation, and others with existing strong scholarly interest in the subject. But this publication made it to Hong Kong, among other places, a long way from north Yorkshire.

A similar story came from **Helen Fallon**, Librarian of **Maynooth University**. You're forgiven for trying to remember where Maynooth might be. It's a small city about thirty miles west of Dublin, and the institution was from its founding until 1968 exclusively a seminary training Catholic priests. It has since diversified and is a full, but still modest-sized, campus of the **National University of Ireland**. However, this story of library publishing has to do with Nigeria. An Irish nun, **Sister Majella McCarron**, who had been in Africa for many years, worked there with a civil-rights activist named **Ken Saro-Wiwa**, who led the struggle to protect the Ogoni people of coastal Nigeria from the depredations of Big Oil in the 1980s and 1990s. The government reaction was fierce and violent. **Saro-Wiwa** and a group of his colleagues were arrested, tried on trumped-up charges, and eventually tragically executed, to set an example to others not to interfere with the environmentally and culturally rapacious ways of the petroleum extraction business. It was sheer coincidence that **Sister Majella**, returning to Ireland shortly after, had connections at **Maynooth** that led to the library taking a role in preserving and cataloging photos and documents she had brought home — and collecting additional materials. In support of the cause **Saro-Wiwa** had died for, this led to the nascent library publishing enterprise producing a book length account reproducing many of the documents and making it available on the net, again for open access distribution.



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The effect of the **Maynooth** publication was similar to the **White Rose** archaeology report: strikingly large numbers of downloads worldwide and much more impact in *Nigeria* than could ever have been the case with a conventionally published book. Both products brought works of value to small and well-defined communities of interest and found wide distribution for these works — and much more of an ongoing influence than could ever have been the case for traditional publishing.

One common theme of those and other stories was that similar projects, focusing on material of local, regional, or institutional interest and expecting interested but small and sometimes widely distributed audiences, can and should be given the structure and cachet of formal publication. The other important theme was the commitment to open access publication. There is a lot to be said or argued over about open access, but I came away convinced that in the “use case” of library publishing, there’s an important body of material that can *only* come into existence and reach its audience effectively if it’s both professionally prepared and freely distributed.

The papers we heard in Dublin proved to my satisfaction that publishing efforts in libraries, even at limited scale (sometimes teams of two or three people, all with other ‘day jobs’), have an important role. Sharing such stories is one way of making it possible for other institutions to take inspiration and action themselves.

In addition, there were discussions of ways to organize. One of the members of the organizing committee of the Dublin-IFLA Midterm meeting was **Educopia’s Melanie Schlosser**, who is also the Community Facilitator of the



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U.S.-based **Library Publishing Coalition**, founded in 2013/14. The LPC publishes an annual *Library Publishing Directory* of its members’ efforts. That Directory gives further ideas and, of course, names of institutions and colleagues with experience they are happy to share with others.

What was it **Molly Malone** used to sing as she went through the streets of Dublin selling sea shellfish from the seashore? “Alive, alive-oh!” That’s a good tune for all the library publishing efforts we heard about and a cheering thought to conclude this essay. 🌿

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veloped an **e-learning platform** that allows users to create easy-to-build tutorials, teaching users how to use website-based tools. The system, originally created to teach students how to use complex library databases, has now been licensed to startup **Sidecar Learning**. The startup team, consisting of company co-founders **Jason Dewland** and **Yvonne Mery**, worked with **Tech Launch Arizona**, or **TLA** — the office of the UA that commercializes inventions stemming from the work of University faculty and staff — to mature, strategize and license the technology into the company. “With this platform,” **Dewland** says, “anyone can create a tutorial and turn the World Wide Web into an interactive classroom.” The company name, derived from the concept of a **motorcycle sidecar**, was chosen because it is reflective of how the software functions. When users enter a URL into the

Sidecar web software in a browser, it opens a sidebar that takes up about 10 percent of the window. Within that window, educators can build experiences to guide learners through web pages, ask interactive questions, provide real-time feedback and assess understanding. **Dewland** and **Mery** worked with **TLA** and the **McGuire Program for Entrepreneurship in the UA Eller College of Management** to take advantage of the services available to develop the strategy for **Sidecar Learning**.

<https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/startup-licenses-ua-libraries-elearning-platform>

Optimism for us librarians and publishers! A study released by **Rakuten OverDrive** reveals that **technology has helped Americans find more opportunities to consume books**. The shift towards digital content has allowed readers to continue to enjoy books **anytime, anywhere, on any device** — even despite constant demands for attention from the outside world. The study found that over the past year, 43 percent of respondents have read eBooks and 34 percent of respondents have listened

to audiobooks — and 87 percent of those respondents are consuming audiobooks while doing other activities.

<https://company.overdrive.com/2019/04/16/overdrive-releases-new-survey-showing-technology-is-enabling-reading-in-more-ways-in-todays-fast-paced-world/>

Speaking of studies. The **2018 Ithaka Faculty Survey Results** were presented at **ACRL** and **Leah** was there. There were 6 key findings presented by **Ithaka**, and **ATG** will be presenting a special online or print issue getting librarians to cover each of the 6 key findings and discuss whether that resonates with what they observe or experience with faculty at their own institutions. See executive summary here: <https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/2018-us-faculty-survey/>.

See! I told you there are a lot of Rumors! Keep them coming! <kstrauch@comcast.net> Meantime, try to keep cool! It’s supposed to be in the 80s today and it’s only April! 🌿